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Intersections at a Multiethnic High School: C3WP Meets Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Pedagogy

AMY CARPENTER FORD AND MARIA KIOUSSIS

From Critical Roots: Forwarding Democracy with the C3WP

The College, Career, and Community Writers Program (C3WP) is National Writing Project's new and innovative argument writing program designed to equip students to participate in public, civic, and civil arguments as informed citizens that can contribute to and strengthen democracy (Friedrich, Bear, & Fox, 2018). Particularly in this era of political polarization in which we tend to insulate ourselves in "echo chambers," such a goal calls for a conceptualization of argument as a conversation. Unlike traditional persuasive writing or typical political debates, C3WP pushes students to consider multiple viewpoints and avoid simplistic binary characterizations of issues. In response to today's "argument culture" steeped in debate anchored by conviction, the C3WP urges dialogue that seeks understanding across different perspectives and in doing so, answers the urgent call for the civic engagement and respectful discourse that are integral to a democracy.

With this democratic orientation toward argument, the C3WP features skills-based mini-units in which students explore multiple perspectives on issues of national interest in order to join meaningful conversations (National Writing Project). After annotating, responding to, and selecting information from nonfiction themed text sets, students wrestle with and reconcile opposing viewpoints in order to craft nuanced claims based on the evidence from those sources. As students compose their informed arguments, they make moves with evidence to forward or counter another author's text or ideas (Harris, 2015). Writers can forward a text to support their ideas in three ways: illustrating their ideas by providing examples; authorizing their ideas by invoking the authority of another writer; and extending another author's ideas by adding to or applying them in a new way. Teaching students to make these moves skillfully is essential to contributing to the public and civic conversations and participating in our democracy as vocal citizens.

Implementation of the C3WP through the National

Writing Project (NWP) has intentionally prioritized economically poor, rural communities by providing professional development for teachers in under-resourced schools (Bear & Fox, 2019). With its roots in critical pedagogy, the C3WP has been shown to be effective in developing students' argument writing skills in those rural schools (Gallagher, Arshan, & Woodworth, 2017) and more recently, in both rural and urban schools (Arshan, Park, & Gallagher, 2018). While research on C3WP implementation is emerging (e.g. Brockman et al., 2018), we are eager for representations of how to adapt the C3WP to various school contexts with diverse populations of students. Such representations can expedite and facilitate implementation of the C3WP and inform the NWP as it continually updates and refines the program.

In this article we describe how an English teacher (Ms. K.) at a multiethnic, suburban high school adapted the C3WP to be culturally relevant and sustaining for her students. Specifically, we recount how she employed tools from three mini-units ("Coming to Terms with Evidence," "Coming to Terms with Opposing Viewpoints," and "Making Moves with Evidence") and generated two text sets: a teacher-selected set of non-fiction texts and a student-curated multimedia text set comprised of meaningful forms of argument in their everyday lives. But first, we clarify what we mean by "culturally relevant and sustaining" and highlight key features of the C3WP that make it ripe for adaptation, including its emphasis on multiple perspectives and guidelines inviting teachers to create their own text sets.

C3WP Meets Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Pedagogy

With its political roots in a critical pedagogy and prioritization of economically under-resourced communities (Bear & Fox, 2019), C3WP has the potential for adaptation as culturally relevant pedagogy, which has as its primary goal to empower students to critically examine society and work for

social change (Ladson-Billings, 1992b). In practice, culturally relevant pedagogy cultivates students' cultural competence by building their knowledge about and pride in their language, culture, and ways of knowing; promotes students' academic achievement by preparing them for success in schools and society; and fosters students' sociopolitical lens so that they can critique and dismantle oppressive hierarchies and structures at a systematic level (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Culturally relevant pedagogy values the multicultural diversity that mitigates conformity and encourages the productive disagreement central to democracy (Ladson-Billings, 1992a).

Sustaining the diversity and cultural pluralism that characterizes our democracy is essential, and therefore, cultivating the culturally-based practices of communities of color as a function of schooling is essential for our democracy. As the next-generation iteration of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2014), Paris & Alim's (2017) culturally sustaining pedagogy is more intentional about preserving and revitalizing the cultural practices that have enabled communities of color to endure in the face of systematic oppression. Like the C3WP, culturally sustaining pedagogy is a response to recent political and demographic trends: anti-ethnic studies curriculum in Arizona, English-only educational policies, and increasing numbers of students of color in the nation's public schools. These shifts make it imperative to, on the one hand, decenter the "white gaze" (Morrison, 1988, cited in Paris & Alim, 2007) that measures academic achievement in terms of white, middle class expectations and, on the other hand, preserve intergenerational heritage language and literacy practices in the traditional sense while recognizing the various and evolving ways those practices are dynamically employed by today's youth and communities of color. Sustaining these practices will benefit all students and our democracy, because all students will need more cultural dexterity and a broader repertoire of language and literacy practices in order to hear the voices of others and be heard by others. In this way, the benefits of culturally sustaining pedagogy extend beyond the communities of color the approach explicitly advocates for and align with the ambitious democratic goals of the C3WP.

The C3WP has thoughtfully anticipated culturally relevant adaptations. Its themed sets feature texts from multiple perspectives on controversial issues of national importance. Themes include police use of force, opioid addiction, the cost of college, transgender bathrooms, and driverless cars. By addressing issues of interest to groups vulnerable to marginalization by race, class, geographic location, and sexual orienta-

tion, these text sets engage students in conversations about citizens' rights in a diverse democracy.

Moreover, the C3WP encourages teachers to make the program more culturally relevant by swapping text sets and providing students autonomy through choice (National Writing Project). A recently added Picketchart "How to Create a Text Set" offers teachers a guide for creating themed text sets. The guide includes steps for identifying argument skills, choosing a topic, and searching for, selecting, and sequencing texts. It also offers considerations for the texts' accessibility and variety in terms of modes, genres, and perspectives. Variety in perspective is important because the C3WP's potential to foster a culturally relevant sociopolitical critique is based on the assumption that engagement with multiple viewpoints generates deeper understandings and more thoughtful positions on an issue (Bear & Fox, 2019).

In C3WP "text" is defined broadly to include audio, visual, and digital material, such as speeches, videos, and social media texts, as included in the recently added mini-unit, "Annotating Audio and Video Evidence." Incorporating multimedia texts honors the various forms of expression youth embrace in their everyday lives, on social media and in contemporary cultural communities (#HipHopEd; Morrel, 2005). Valuing and validating the language and literacy practices utilized by today's youth is especially important as today's schools become increasingly multiethnic (Paris & Alim, 2017), as was the school setting of Ms. K's 10th grade English classroom, which we describe in the next section.

Extending C3WP to a Multiethnic Context

Intersection High School

Ms. K. has been teaching 9th and 10th grade inclusion English classes at Intersection High School (a pseudonym) for three years. A multiethnic high school in a Midwestern state, Intersection functions as a hub of cultural plurality and exchange. Due to the surrounding city's proximity to a state university and declaration as a sanctuary city, Intersection High School hosts a rich international population, with students from approximately twenty-eight different countries. The student body is 77% white, 6% black, 5% Hispanic, 5% Asian/Pacific Islander, 6% multiracial, and <1% American Indian; 31% of students used the free/reduced lunch program (although more were eligible for it), and 14% received special education services. Ms. K.'s classes have a slightly higher

concentration of diversity than in the school as a whole. For instance, of her 82 tenth graders, 28% are students of color, 25% receive special education services, and 11% are multi-lingual or ESL.

Located in a largely liberal city in a predominantly conservative state, a significant political divide exists within Intersection's district. In 2016, a school-wide controversy over student adornment with the Confederate flag caused the school and district to renew their commitment to cultural responsiveness. Professional development has been held at monthly faculty meetings and bi-annual district-wide sessions. Intersection has a staff Equity Team and ethnic clubs for students, such as "The Movement" for Black youth and "Woke Wednesdays," which Ms. K. advises. In sum, there is significant discussion and awareness of culture, cultural differences, and cultural responsiveness, coupled with a pressing need to counter white supremacist discourses, listen to students of color, promote understanding across difference, and forward arguments for a democracy that values diversity and cultural pluralism.

Ms. K. is often at the center of diversity discussions at Intersection. Her embrace of culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies took root in her undergraduate English teacher education program under the mentorship of a professor and former urban high school teacher (Dr. Ford). This co-authored article represents the ongoing journey of a white English teacher (Kioussis) and a white teacher educator (Ford) as we engage in collaborative inquiry around Ms. K.'s implementation of the C3WP.

Ms. K. Meets C3WP

Ms. K.'s introduction to C3WP was unique in that it came through a university-based graduate course taught by the Co-Director of a local National Writing Project site rather than through participation in a National Writing Project institute. As part of the course, Ms. K. read Harris's (2015) book, reviewed the C3WP, and grew inspired to incorporate its mini-units into her curriculum. At Intersection, teachers of each subject share a common curriculum that prescribes particular course content, but each team has flexibility in choosing texts and thematic ideas while crafting a standards-based curriculum, and each teacher has flexibility in implementation to tailor students' learning experiences to meet their needs. The project discussed here was completed as a summative assessment for a unit on the Harlem Renaissance.

Illustrating the C3WP

A focus on the Harlem Renaissance was an option in Intersection High School's 10th grade English curriculum. Often taught with an exclusive focus on literature and literary analysis, Ms. K. redesigned the curriculum to be more culturally relevant, offer students more choices, and incorporate argument writing. Like teachers who had received professional development through NWP sites, Ms. K. shifted the emphasis from literary analysis and literature to argument writing by integrating more non-fiction texts (Gallagher et al., 2017). Using the nonfiction texts as lenses, the questions that emerged to guide the class's exploration of the Harlem Renaissance became: What arguments about social justice were made during the Harlem Renaissance? How does each text contribute to the argument? How does each author represent a unique perspective on the Black experience? Once these guiding questions were articulated, it became clear that not only were the nonfiction texts argumentative, but the poetry and short stories included in the unit were making arguments about social justice as well and contributing to the conversation.

While describing the literature, art, and music Ms. K. included as part of the Harlem Renaissance Unit would enliven our retelling by incorporating a wider array of texts, perspectives, genres, and modes, we focus on describing how Ms. K. incorporated three C3WP mini-units ("Coming to Terms with Evidence," "Coming to Terms with Opposing Viewpoints" and "Making Moves with Evidence") and generated two text sets: a teacher-selected set of legacy texts assembled from arguments of the Harlem Renaissance and a student-generated set of contemporary texts that show how those arguments are alive in contemporary, artistic forms of argument embraced by the youth of today.

Creating a Culturally Relevant Text Set

For this unit, the process Ms. K. used to search for, select, and sequence non-fiction texts from the Harlem Renaissance was similar to the C3WP's Piktochart guide. She sought thought-provoking essays that would provide her students with a framework for interpreting the art, music, and literature of the Harlem Renaissance to illuminate how artistic forms of expression function as arguments for social change. In searching for texts from multiple perspectives, she sought diverse depictions of the black experience in America and varying arguments for how to achieve racial justice. As a white woman teacher, she felt it was important to select texts that resisted assimilating all people of color into one opin-

ion or belief system. Ultimately, she selected three heritage texts: “The New Negro” by Alain Locke, “The Souls of Black Folks” by W. E. B. DuBois, and Zora Neale Hurston’s “How It Feels to be Colored Me.”

As a set, the texts function in conversation, extending, illustrating, authorizing, and countering each other to create a nuanced argument for racial justice. Illuminating the relationships between these authors’ perspectives developed students’ understandings of argument as a conversation and skills in making moves with evidence. Ms. K. sequenced Locke, DuBois, and Hurston to highlight the legacy of the New Negro Movement, the challenges of racial double-consciousness, and strategies to avert the white gaze. Analyzing literature, art, and music of the Harlem Renaissance through lenses gleaned from these three non-fiction texts illuminated for students how artistic forms of expression function as arguments for social justice.

Starting with Locke and DuBois—the most challenging and complex texts of the year—was a daunting task. In order to make the texts more accessible, Ms. K. edited a one page excerpt from each. The language itself was not changed, but the length was cut in order to allow time to complete a guided close-reading of the texts in class. It was important Ms. K. avoid simplifying the language of these authors for two reasons. First, considering the social justice arguments that were part of this unit, it was significant to her that the most intellectually advanced, complex texts they’d read all year were coming from authors of color. She did not want to simplify their arguments, but instead aimed to celebrate their complexity by being explicit with students about the reasoning behind her text selection. Second, Ms. K. aimed to capitalize on the texts’ complexity by illuminating the nuanced conversation they created.

Coming to Terms with Evidence

The nuance stemming from the texts’ complexity was used to push students away from binary thinking. The goal while reading was not to put the authors in opposition, but instead, like the C3WP suggests, to provide models for complex arguments and see them in conversation. Students were told not to think about whether the authors agreed or disagreed with each other on the whole, but instead to look at the subclaims and evidence in the texts in order to better understand the many perspectives in the larger conversation around race and social justice in America. Next, teacher and students annotated the essay together, with the teacher displaying her annotations via the projector. To work through

the annotations, they used strategies from C3WP’s “Coming to Terms with Evidence” to converse with the text by considering the source of credibility, questions they had, and key terms and ideas they noticed. The more texts they read, the more visible the nuance and scope of the authors’ arguments grew, and students worked in small groups and as a class to place texts along a continuum of perspectives that were developed on different topics and ideas throughout the unit.

Coming to Terms with Opposing Viewpoints

As students worked to understand and analyze the arguments of each text, Ms. K. incorporated tools from Harris’ book (2015) and the C3WP unit “Coming to Terms with Opposing Viewpoints” in order to understand and value similarities and differences in the arguments made by various texts. Using these tools, students worked individually, in small groups, and as a class to consider the main claims, sub claims, limitations, and evidence used in respective texts. While the C3WP employs nonfiction texts, Ms. K.’s unit pushed students to come to terms with arguments made in poetry and short stories, considering how this literature extended, authorized, illustrated, or countered the arguments made in the nonfiction sources. This realization that artistic forms of expression could function as argument was foundational to the text sets students generated to show how the arguments of the Harlem Renaissance are alive today.

Curating a Student-Generated Text Set

While all of the texts in the teacher-generated non-fiction set were essays, students had the opportunity to make choices about mode and genre as they curated their own text set. What counted was that they demonstrated the ability to make connections between the historical texts and contemporary texts; between the arguments of Locke, DuBois, and Hurston and today’s arguments for social justice; between the Harlem Renaissance movement and contemporary social movements; between essays and art as forms of expression.

In the culminating assignment, students were invited to choose a piece of contemporary art that embodied the ideas, philosophies, and arguments of the Harlem Renaissance, create a visual presentation, and show how the art forwarded (Harris, 2015) those arguments. The art students chose ranged from books to interviews to film clips to paintings to YouTube videos to songs, which were the most popular genre chosen.

While many students chose Black artists, some chose art by other marginalized groups (LatinX, LGBTQ+). The result was that students made connections between the arguments

of Locke, DuBois, and Hurston and, for example, the movie *Black Panther*; Diane Guerrero's interview about her memoir *In This Country, We Love, My Family Divided*; Kehinde Wiley's portraits series; Childish Gambino's "This is America," and J. Cole's song "1985." By allowing students choice in text, each class built a unique text set that reflected the students in that classroom.

Making Moves with Evidence

The C3WP inspired component of the visual presentation called for students to identify a quote from DuBois, Locke, or Hurston and provide two or more sentences of analysis explaining how their chosen piece of art forward—extends, authorizes, or illustrates—the ideas expressed in the quote. This requirement was a way for students to ignite a discussion with their classmates about how the artistic text they selected illustrated, authorized, extended, or countered the arguments of the Harlem Renaissance as a conversation (Harris, 2015). By going through this close-reading and the process of writing their analysis, students were able to think critically about how the texts they were highlighting added to or continued the conversation around race, culture, and justice that began during the Harlem Renaissance. We expand on the class discussions in the next section where we reflect on the implications for culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy.

Forwarding the C3WP in Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Pedagogy

The considerations Ms. K. made in her design and implementation of the Harlem Renaissance Project may be useful for others implementing the C3WP or seeking greater cultural relevance and sustainability. By analyzing Ms. K.'s C3WP implementation through the lenses of culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies, we illuminate considerations for facilitating dialogue across multiple perspectives, creating text sets for students in multiethnic classrooms, and sustaining the heritage and community language and literacy practices of youth that promote a more equitable, inclusive, and socially just democracy that values diversity and cultural pluralism.

Incorporating C3WP Tools

Because Ms. K.'s professional development around C3WP was distinct from NWP site training, it may be difficult to generalize from this representation of Ms. K.'s teaching. Yet the C3WP's implementational flexibility is what enabled her to incorporate its tools within her culturally relevant and sustaining curriculum and pedagogical approach. Ms. K. and her students found the C3WP tools valuable for exploring multiple perspectives by coming to terms with the evidence and opposing viewpoints and by making moves with evidence during discussions. Another mini-unit for Ms. K. to consider might be "Curating to Counter," and the NWP is continuously updating and adding resources to the C3WP site.

Facilitating the dialogue engendered by the C3WP required intentional strategies and attention to power dynamics in this multiethnic context. While the C3WP's assumption is that engaging with diverse perspectives will lead to more informed arguments, Ms. K.'s approach to teaching for social justice entailed facilitating discussions to amplify the perspectives of vulnerable or marginalized groups over others, including her own. This "multipartial" facilitation strategy springs from intergroup dialogue and assumes that non-dominant narratives need more airtime to discuss and more processing time to digest than familiar, mainstream, dominant narratives (Maxwell, Nagda, & Thompson, 2012). Within the Harlem Renaissance unit at the predominantly-white Intersection High, this meant devoting more time and attention to forwarding arguments for racial justice than to countering those for white supremacy.

Within her multiethnic classroom, Ms. K. was explicit about the limitations of her own perspective, emphasizing that as a white woman, she was no expert on the black experience, so it was important to read and listen to the voices of the African American authors. This positioned the African American students in the class as the most knowledgeable about their own experiences and authorized the perspectives of other students of color who share those experiences. By applying standpoint theory (Collins, 2000) in this way, Ms. K. encouraged students to speak for themselves without pressuring them to do so. With intentional facilitation strategies, Ms. K. capitalized on the C3WP's intentions to promote understanding across different perspectives and did so in a way that forwarded arguments for social justice.

Creating Culturally Relevant Text Sets

To create the Harlem Renaissance text set, Ms. K. employed a process similar to that provided in C3WP's guide to incorporate multiple perspectives. To make the set culturally relevant for her students, Ms. K. chose texts that would foster a sociopolitical critique of enduring racial injustices, expand all students' knowledge about diverse black experiences, and deepen African American students' pride in their culture. Teachers designing culturally relevant text sets might pay particular attention to issues of representation and ask:

- Did I incorporate diverse depictions of cultural groups and intersecting identities?
- Did I spotlight the intellectual contributions of authors from under-represented or marginalized groups and the complexity of their texts?
- Did I make choices about texts explicit for students?

Creating Culturally Sustaining Text Sets

Building on Ms. K.'s efforts, we believe that the C3WP has the potential to become a culturally sustaining approach that intentionally fosters the heritage language, literacies, and cultural practices of youth and communities of color (Paris & Alim, 2017). For Ms. K., this might have meant making connections between the Harlem Renaissance's rhetoric and literary aesthetic and modern modes of persuasion and style employed in contemporary arguments and youth communities of today. Creating themed text sets to be culturally sustaining would require additional attention to the questions:

- What culturally-based language and literacy practices are described or exemplified in these texts?
- Which practices are worthy of being sustained or modified?
- How can these practices promote a more socially just world?

Teachers unfamiliar with the culturally-based practices of multiethnic youth may need to engage youth in answering these questions. Toward this end, inviting students to generate their own text sets, as Ms. K. did, has great potential in illuminating the community practices of today's social movements and seeking out their traditional roots. When given the freedom to select their final text for analysis, Ms. K.'s students came up with an impressive range of sources across a spectrum of media. They connected the Harlem Renaissance to black art today, as well as that of LatinX and LGBTQ+

communities. Expanding the diversity of perspectives represented made visible issues around which interests and experiences aligned across overlapping social groups and justice movements. Ultimately, all of the texts students chose made socio-political arguments that highlighted a need for change in order to break cycles of oppression and injustice.

Sustaining Arguments and Skills for Social Justice

Connecting the texts of the Harlem Renaissance to the multimedia texts of today's social movements highlighted how arguments for racial justice have endured, but evolved and led to the discovery that art functioned as a mode of argument then, as it does now. Students demonstrated literary analytical skills and rhetorical skills to recognize arguments in media, much like Locke did in "The New Negro," suggesting that these critical literacy skills are to be cherished and cultivated. In class discussions, students extended conversations about DuBois' construct of double-consciousness to social justice movements and black textual identities in social media (Cherry McDaniel, 2017; Lyiscott, 2017), suggesting that the concept of double-consciousness and these social media literacy practices are worthy of sustaining. Finally, one student drew upon Hurston's "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" to identify strategies for shirking the white gaze that results in double-consciousness. Truly sustaining students' language and literacy practices in pursuit of social justice would require making transparent how text sets comprised of heritage texts and contemporary texts work together to forward Black literary and rhetorical traditions as the legacy of social protest literacies inherited by students and communities of color (Kynard, 2013). Teachers might ask themselves:

- Did I incorporate legacy texts that convey traditional, heritage practices?
- Did I incorporate contemporary texts or textual connections that will sustain youth engagement in those practices?
- Which C3WP mini-units and tools will support students in making connections between legacy and contemporary texts and cultural practices?

Calling for More Conversation

Culturally sustaining pedagogy also requires us to reflect on which language and literacy practices are being cultivated and sustained in C3WP. To answer this, we allude to Western assumptions about ideas as individuals' intellectual property

that warrants citation, the emphasis on source-based evidence over lived experiences of youth that may not be documented (Muhammed & Maddix, 2016), the privileging of the written text over oral traditions (Allard, 2019), and the often taken-for-granted premise that “standard English” is the most effective language with which to convey an argument and assess its value (Baker-Bell, 2013; Behizadeh, 2017). What happens to C3WP at the intersection of critical language pedagogy, indigenous and decolonizing pedagogies, Black girl literacies, and contrastive rhetoric? Is there room within C3WP to include multimedia genres, artistic forms of expression, and linguistic code-meshing, or would that derail the C3WP’s democratic agenda? As a first step in forwarding a culturally sustaining approach within the C3WP, maybe we can invite students to compose arguments in forms of multimedia texts that call upon the language and literacy practices of their cultural communities to “create their own critical texts that can be used in the fight for social justice” (Morrell, 2005, p. 313).

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Maria Kioussis is a graduate student at Central Michigan University's Master of Arts in English Composition and Communication. Committed to promoting equity and social justice in schools, she strives to implement culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies in her classroom at the multiethnic high school where she teaches 9th and 10th grade inclusion classes and works closely with youth in after-school and extracurricular programs.